

**MINUTES  
of the  
FIFTH MEETING  
of the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**October 9, 2013  
Sgt. Willie Estrada Memorial Civic Center  
Alamogordo**

The fifth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez, co-chair, on October 9, 2013 at 9:10 a.m. at the Sgt. Willie Estrada Memorial Civic Center in Alamogordo.

**Present**

Sen. Richard C. Martinez, Co-Chair  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez,  
Co-Chair  
Sen. William F. Burt  
Rep. Nathan "Nate" Cote  
Rep. Bob Wooley

**Absent**

Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton  
Sen. Daniel A. Ivey-Soto  
Sen. William H. Payne

**Advisory Members**

Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Rep. Yvette Herrell  
Sen. John Pinto  
Rep. Jeff Steinborn

Sen. Craig W. Brandt  
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros  
Rep. George Dodge, Jr.  
Sen. Timothy M. Keller  
Sen. Cliff R. Pirtle  
Rep. Dennis J. Roch  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval  
Sen. Lisa A. Torracco

**Staff**

Peter Kovnat, Staff Attorney, Legislative Council Service (LCS)  
Kathleen Dexter, Researcher, LCS  
Jennifer Dana, Intern, LCS

**Guests**

The guest list is in the meeting file.

**Handouts**

Copies of all handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file.

**Wednesday, October 9**

**New Mexico State University (NMSU) Military and Veterans Programs**

Jacobo Varela, assistant registrar, NMSU, gave an overview of programs for military personnel and veterans at NMSU. Through its outreach efforts on campus, at military bases and through service organizations in the region, NMSU helps service members and veterans access education benefits and tuition and housing assistance from the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DOD). To date in 2013, these federal programs have paid approximately \$4.8 million in tuition and fees to NMSU for nearly 3,500 military and veteran students enrolled at all of its campuses. In addition to financial concerns, the university works to remove a wide range of barriers commonly faced by military and veteran students, from inconsistent and delayed transcripts to service-related emotional trauma. Because of its efforts to help these students, NMSU has been designated a "military friendly" institution by GI Jobs and Military Advanced Education for the past several years.

Mr. Varela noted that NMSU does not yet have an official veteran resource center (VRC), as does the University of New Mexico (UNM). Such a center would provide more comprehensive and integrated services for military and veteran students, including a VetSuccess on Campus program, a career services advisor and space for a student veterans' association and lounge. Even without a VRC, however, the university hopes to expand its resources for military and veteran students through a Texas Guaranteed Philanthropy grant and other grants being pursued by the university's military and veterans programs, the Counseling and Educational Psychology Department and the Family and Consumer Sciences Department.

On questioning, Mr. Varela and committee members addressed the following topics.

*"Honor cords"*. A survey of comparable institutions found that approximately one-half of them award red, white and blue honor cords to graduating military and veteran students.

*Counseling services and suicide*. NMSU collaborates with a veterans' clinic in Las Cruces to provide individual and group services for students who need posttraumatic stress disorder treatment. The university's Crisis Assistance Listening Line, or CALL line, while not veteran-specific, does have veterans on staff and will refer veterans to national or regional hotlines that specialize in veteran issues.

*GI Bill*. The GI Bill covers up to 36 months of tuition for a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree and must be used within 10 years of discharge from the military. Veterans who attend certain university branch campuses in New Mexico are unable to use their GI Bill benefits because the branch campuses provide only associate's degrees; those veterans must transfer to, or take distance courses from, the main campus. Under Chapter 33 of the GI Bill, tuition benefits are paid directly to schools. Housing allowances, which go to the students, may be delayed because of the federal government shutdown, and Mr. Varela will work with affected veterans who need rent deferments.

*Military and veteran student employment.* The VA funds six work-study positions in NMSU's military and veterans programs. NMSU also has work-study positions in other departments.

*Segregation.* NMSU does not segregate students by veteran status for either coursework or housing. Veteran students tend to support one another, and certain degree programs, such as engineering, tend to have a high proportion of veterans enrolled.

*Alcohol and drug abuse.* NMSU's Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education program addresses alcohol and drug abuse issues for all students, including veterans.

*Retention.* NMSU has a retention rate of approximately 60 percent for military and veteran students, who tend to start with less than a full course load and take about six years to complete a bachelor's degree. Mandy Dykman, who directs the VRC at UNM, is working with Mr. Varela to strengthen military and veterans programs collaboratively between the two universities and keep veterans in school through their graduation.

*Veterans' lounge.* NMSU plans to build a lounge for military and veteran students, using collaborative funding from the university and the community.

★ Mr. Varela:

1. will provide contact information to Representative Cote for the NMSU Student Veterans Organization; and
2. invited committee members to a Veterans' Day picnic on November 7, 2013 at NMSU.

## **Welcome**

Mayor Susie Galea welcomed the committee to Alamogordo. She noted that the area is home to many veterans, including many who retired following their service at Holloman Air Force Base (AFB), and that it is a prime location for a veterans cemetery.

## **White Sands Missile Range (WSMR)**

Dan Hicks, deputy to the executive director, WSMR, gave a presentation on work done at WSMR and concerns over the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, which will provide a high-capacity transmission line for renewable energy production in New Mexico. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has settled on a preferred route for the transmission line that, while it does not enter WSMR, does traverse a section of BLM land north of the missile range that is used for training flights and missile tests. WSMR and adjoining lands provide a training and testing environment that mimics conditions faced by the U.S. military in its current operations in the Middle East. Mr. Hicks expressed concern that having the transmission line at the north end of the range would hamper missile testing that cannot be conducted elsewhere in the U.S. While the DOD supports the development of renewable energy resources and is, itself, under a mandate to partially convert to renewable and alternative energy for its operations, it does not support the

SunZia project as currently proposed and prefers instead that the transmission line be moved north of the area used for missile testing.

On questioning, Mr. Hicks and committee members addressed the following topics.

*Final decision on route.* The BLM originally planned to make its decision on the route for the SunZia transmission line in October or November; however, the federal government shutdown may delay that decision. The BLM already has all of the information it needs. Brigadier General John Regan, former commander of WSMR, requested that the BLM consider two alternate routes in lieu of the current proposed route, which is not acceptable. U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich requested a study of acceptable test protocols that would allow the DOD to continue its WSMR mission if the BLM-preferred route is adopted.

*Other powerlines.* There is a local power distribution line north of WSMR that, at 40 feet high, is considered an allowable risk under standards established by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and used by WSMR. Powerlines at the height of the proposed SunZia lines exceed the NASA allowable risk.

*Low-level flights and missile testing.* Low-level flights by the U.S. Air Force are flown between 400 feet and 500 feet in altitude; the German Air Force flies as low as 100 feet in altitude. WSMR provides the longest test area for such low-level flights, and every bit of the range and its immediate surroundings must be clear to achieve a full "kill chain sequence". If the SunZia transmission line is located beyond the area used for flights and testing, WSMR will not need additional space for future operations.

*Base realignment and closures (BRAC).* WSMR is relatively safe from the BRAC process because of its unique resources, though it might undergo some mission change.

*Electronic filtering.* WSMR has the capability to test filtering mechanisms designed to protect electronic systems from solar flares and rogue nation attacks.

## **SunZia**

Tom Wray and John Strand, project manager and governmental affairs director, respectively, SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, gave an update on the SunZia project and challenges presented by WSMR's request to move a portion of the transmission line off the BLM-preferred route. After four years and \$40 million of permitting and studies, the final proposed route crosses the northern edge of the WSMR "call-up area", a block of land that is not part of the missile range but over which the U.S. Air Force conducts training flights. The majority of land in this area is state trust land, and SunZia's lease for right of way through the land would generate long-term revenue for public education. The project would also generate long-term revenue for the state by establishing an export infrastructure for a nondepletable resource and by creating jobs in both the construction and operation stages. SunZia has received letters and resolutions of support from a half dozen local governments based on the current

BLM-preferred route. If the route is approved by the BLM, construction would begin in 2015 and operation would begin in 2017 or 2018. On average, the SunZia transmission line structures would be 135 feet tall.

On questioning, the presenters and committee members addressed the following topics.

*Line capacity and use.* The project includes two 500 kilovolt transmission lines rated at 3,000 megawatts of total capacity, which equals the entire electrical load from Bernalillo County and eastern Sandoval County. The first substation on the route, located between Corona and Carrizozo, will produce 1,500 megawatts of wind-powered energy. Other renewable energy companies along the route have been unable to feed into existing transmission lines to date because of a lack of capacity on those lines and have expressed interest in the SunZia line. Federal restrictions prohibit discrimination among different types of energy on any given transmission line; the SunZia line must accept both renewable and nonrenewable energy.

*Moving the line.* The BLM prefers the transmission line's current route because it helps the agency meet its statutory duty to provide additional uses of its land, such as grazing and easements. If the BLM chooses to move the route to accommodate training flights and missile tests, 46 miles would be added to the length of the line at an estimated cost of \$125 million. In addition, a supplemental environmental impact study would be required, and the entire route may be opened up for new studies, which could delay construction by three to four years. Though the estimated cost is \$1.6 billion for the BLM-preferred route and \$2 billion for the WSMR-preferred route, the cost difference is not presented as a comment on the value of servicemembers' lives or the value of their training opportunities.

Speaking from the audience on invitation of the chair, Mr. Hicks clarified that:

1. the DOD did not appropriate the call-up area for WSMR because there were still bad feelings among local ranchers who were displaced when WSMR was first created;
2. the DOD wants the area to serve as a buffer for the missile range's north end;
3. a 2009 letter from Brigadier General David Mann stating that "a route along Highway 380 may be acceptable" was not meant as an endorsement of that route; and
4. WSMR approves of Alternate Routes 1 and 1A.

### **Minutes**

On a motion by Representative Wooley, seconded by Senator Burt, the minutes from the September 3, 2013 meeting were unanimously approved.

### **Fort Stanton Update**

Bill Guthrie, chair, Lincoln/Otero County Veterans Leadership Council, noted that nearly 9,000 veterans live in Lincoln and Otero counties and that the veteran population strongly

supports the establishment of a veterans cemetery at Fort Stanton. He also urged the committee to support legislation to exempt military retirement pay from state income tax.

Larry Holt, volunteer administrator, Fort Stanton, gave a presentation on Fort Stanton's history and its appropriateness as a veterans cemetery. Fort Stanton has been in continuous operation since its establishment in 1899 by the federal government, which converted it to a U.S. Public Health Service hospital and cemetery in 1912. The state acquired the facility and land in 1953, and it has served since then as a state tuberculosis hospital, a facility for the developmentally disabled and a Corrections Department facility. If it is designated by the VA as a veterans cemetery, its 13.5 acres would meet projected needs for the veteran population in southeast New Mexico through 2050. It would also help the VA meet its goal that all veterans have access to a cemetery within 75 miles of their homes. The governor plans to establish three or four rural veterans cemeteries, and Mr. Holt urged the committee to support Fort Stanton as the top priority on the governor's list. In order to receive VA funding for the cemeteries, the state must provide a 10 percent match and agree to provide perpetual maintenance.

Speaking from the audience on invitation of the chair, Alan Martinez, deputy secretary for veterans' services, noted that the Veterans' Services Department is conducting town hall meetings in communities that want veterans cemeteries and that Fort Stanton would be less costly to develop than some because it already has a cemetery on site.

- ★ On a motion by Senator Martinez, seconded by Senator Burt, the committee voted unanimously to send a letter to the governor endorsing the concept of state veterans cemeteries and supporting Fort Stanton as the state's top priority for a cemetery.
- ★ Representative Wooley will sponsor a bill to appropriate the 10 percent match necessary for VA funding for the cemeteries.

### **Sergeant Fabian Silva**

Representative Steinborn presented a certificate of appreciation to Sergeant Fabian Silva for inspiring a 2013 law that allows service members who are deployed or on a temporary duty assignment for more than 30 days to suspend utility and telecommunication services without a penalty or reconnection fee.

### **Holloman AFB Update**

Colonel Andrew A. Croft, commander, 49th Wing, Holloman AFB, presented issues regarding the BLM preferred route for the SunZia transmission line and the location of some windmills planned for an area at the east end of the line. Holloman AFB hosts not only the 49th Wing but also the 44th Fighter Group, 96th Test Group, 4th Space Control Squadron and the German Air Force. These entities use air space for low-level training flights on both the west and east sides of the Sacramento Mountains, an area that includes WSMR, the WSMR call-up area and areas where private wind farms are being developed as part of the SunZia project. Colonel Croft expressed his concern that, in their current proposed locations, windmills and the SunZia transmission line could have a negative impact on current and future training missions

based at Holloman AFB. In order for training to continue in the area, windmills must be adjusted to allow a wide flight-easement, and the SunZia transmission line must be moved beyond the northern boundary of the WSMR call-up area.

On questioning, Colonel Croft clarified that the German Air Force, which recently moved its U.S. command structure from Fort Bliss, pays for its facilities at Holloman AFB. It supports U.S. forces on North Atlantic Treaty Organization-based missions.

#### **Holloman AFB Tour**

**D** Committee members toured Holloman AFB and its facilities.

The committee adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

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